

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

September 21, 2018

Honorable Pat Roberts
Chairman
Senate Committee on Agriculture,
Nutrition and Forestry
109 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Honorable Mike Conaway
Chairman
House Committee on Agriculture
2430 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Honorable Debbie Stabenow
Ranking Member
Senate Committee on Agriculture,
Nutrition and Forestry
731 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Honorable Collin Peterson
Ranking Member
House Committee on Agriculture
2204 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Chairman Roberts, Chairman Conaway, Ranking Member Stabenow and Ranking Member Peterson:

We write to express our support for Sec. 6102 and Sec. 6106 of S. 3042, the Agriculture Improvement Act of 2018. These provisions will help ensure rural and small communities have safe drinking water. Regardless of income, population or area code, every person deserves access to safe and affordable drinking water.

Sec. 6102, the Rural Water and Wastewater Technical Assistance and Training program, will enhance the long-term sustainability of the United States Department of Agriculture's (USDA) rural water programs and waste systems doing the following:

- Identifying options to improve operational practices, revenue enhancements, policy revisions, partnerships, consolidations, regionalization or contract services.
- Prioritizing the selection of grants to private non-profit organizations that have experience providing technical assistance to associations in rural low-income communities with unhealthful water supply systems or waste facilities.

Sec. 6106, the Emergency and Imminent Community Water Assistance Grant program (ECWAG) will expand USDA's emergency water grants and research in the following ways:

- Increasing funding per project from \$500,000 to \$1 million. This provision was included in the Fiscal Year 2018 Consolidated Appropriations bill (P.L.115-141).
- Increasing the ECWAG set aside from 3-5 percent to 5-7 percent of the Rural Water and Waste Disposal program account.

- Authorizing \$50 million in appropriations annually through 2023 for financing water and wastewater projects.
- Directing the USDA Secretary to lead an interagency task force to examine drinking water and surface water contamination in rural communities, particularly rural communities that are near active or decommissioned military installations. Across the country, we have seen instances of drinking water contamination from runoff from firefighting foams.
- Reporting the task force findings and recommending how federal, state and local government agencies can work together to address rural drinking water contamination.

The USDA is supportive of these changes and has offered significant technical assistance during the drafting of the Senate farm bill. Moreover, the National Rural Water Association, Rural Community Assistance Partnership, and National Association of Counties all support these updates.

In conclusion, more than 6 million residents living in rural communities across America do not have access to safe drinking water^{1, 2}. And in 2015 alone, roughly 5,000 water facilities had Safe Drinking Water Act violations. More than 50 percent of these facilities were in communities of 500 people or less³. Simply, Americans in these rural communities disproportionately bear the health risks and economic costs associated with unsafe drinking water.

For these reasons, Sec. 6101 and Sec. 6016 of S. 3042, the Agriculture Improvement Act of 2018, should be included in a final Farm Bill to ensure that rural communities have access to safe and affordable drinking water.

We appreciate your attention to this very important matter and your efforts to support clean drinking water for all people.

Sincerely,



Daniel T. Kildee
MEMBER OF CONGRESS



Jack Bergman
MEMBER OF CONGRESS

¹ See Tracy Staedter, There's a Huge Drinking Water Problem Plaguing Rural America, Too, *Earther* (October 2017) <https://earther.gizmodo.com/theres-a-huge-drinking-water-problem-plaguing-rural-ame-1819655918>

² See Environmental Working Group, *Trouble in Farm Country: Ag Runoff Fouls Tap Water Across Rural America* (2018), https://www.ewg.org/tapwater/trouble-in-farm-country.php#.W4_cx85KiUk

³ See National Resource Defense Council, *Threats on Tap: Widespread Violations Highlight need for Investment in Water Infrastructure and Protections* (May 2017), <https://www.nrdc.org/sites/default/files/threats-on-tap-water-infrastructure-protections-report.pdf>